

Unfinished business awaits County Council

- On the agenda: Lending law repeal, replacing a Potomac elementary school and spending and building budgets

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The County Council, on spring break this week, returns Monday to face a full plate of budget and legislative issues.

Topping the list: County Executive Douglas M. Duncan's proposed \$3.9 billion operating budget and \$2.7 billion building budget, which the council must approve by June 1.

While the county expects to see a \$300 million budget surplus by the end of June, council members will have to find ways of shrinking up services in areas where state and federal aid falls short.

"The committee hasn't done their work yet, but anything that starts in the county executive's budget is in a fortunate position. Any cuts that we make would be marginal," said Council President George L. Leventhal (D-At large) of Takoma Park.

Already, the council has heard from a variety of departments, organizations and people wanting a share of the taxpayers' dollar.

During a public hearing last week on the operating budget, more than 25 people testified. Their requests ranged from \$19,600 to renovate playground equipment at the Bel Air center of the Montgomery Child Care system and \$50,000 for outside recycling bins at county schools to a pay raise for the county's migrant and refugee support administrator.

"As for the add-ons to the budget, it's early to say I think we will work within the parameters that are there," Leventhal said.

As budget negotiations begin, so will lobbying by individual council members. Councilwoman Nancy M. Floreen (D-At large) of Garrett Park has proposed adding \$2 million to the library system's budget for materials and maintenance. Her request follows the council's decision last week to make parking at all county libraries free. How the county will

BE HEARD

Public hearings will be held in the Council Office Building at 100 Maryland Ave. in Rockville on:

- April 17 — 7 p.m. On the fiscal 2007 operating budget.
- April 25 — 7:30 p.m. On repealing the predatory lending law.
- May 2 — 7:30 p.m. Options for the Seven Locks Elementary School replacement.

pay the parking initiative is still undecided.

Council members also must contend with the county's growth, not only in its population and development, but also in the widening disparity between the area's rich and poor. Key to this debate will be affordable and special needs housing, both of which are lacking adequate housing units.

Leventhal and Councilman Steven A. Silverman (D-At large) of Silver Spring have proposed \$500,000 to house 50 homeless families. Duncan (D) has included about the same amount in his proposed budget for low-income housing subsidies.

When the council returns, the county executive's office will be focused on budget discussions, said Duncan spokesman David S. Weaver.

"There a number of major initiatives like making sure that all-day kindergarten is expanded, that the money needed to build more schools and renovate older ones is included," Weaver said. "Also, after the General Assembly finishes this week, we will send the council amendments to the budget that reflect votes by that body."

Beyond the budget, the council must clear its agenda of leftover planning issues, including a decision on the Damascus bypass and the Crown Farm annexation by Gaithersburg. Also, it will get an update later this month on compliance rates with the county's Moderate Priced Dwelling Unit, or MPDU, law. And council members will hear replacement options for Potomac's Seven Locks Elementary School, a process attacked earlier this year by the county's inspector general as being inadequate.



Leventhal